

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	Square 77: 2119-2121 H Street and 2124 I Street NW	X	Agenda Consent Calendar
Landmark/District:	GW/West End HD (pending)		
Meeting Date:	December 20, 2012	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	-	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Kim Elliott	X	New Construction

Architect Ayers Saint Gross, on behalf of the George Washington University, seeks conceptual design review for a partial demolition of three buildings, façade retention and restoration, and new construction of a residential dormitory connecting all three buildings to house approximately 850 students. The project sits on Square 77, between H, I, 21st and 22nd Streets, within the pending George Washington/West End Historic District. The project will be submitted to the Zoning Commission as a Planned Unit Development.

GWU Campus Plan and Historic Preservation Plan

This project was first envisioned during the most recent review and reauthorization of the campus plan for GWU's Foggy Bottom campus. During that review process, GWU worked closely with the Office of Planning and Historic Preservation Office in an effort to balance competing demands for accommodating student academic programs and housing on campus, while also protecting the historic character of the campus and neighborhood. The result of these efforts is reflected in the campus plan and its historic preservation components.

In June 2006, the Board adopted the GWU Foggy Bottom Campus Historic Preservation Plan which was developed with HPO and OP planning staff. The plan is based on an evaluation undertaken by HPO which served as the basis for consultation between GW and OP on several distinct preservation concerns: identification of existing and potential historic properties, assessment of potential development sites for preservation impacts, establishment of preservation and development priorities, and formulation of an overall planning strategy to accomplish broad preservation goals.

During the campus plan review process, HPO also evaluated potential development sites identified by GW in terms of their potential to affect existing and potential historic properties and developed guidelines for height, vehicular access, and other issues of compatibility. The three apartment buildings affected by this project -- Schenley, Crawford, and West End dormitories on Square 77 -- were identified as contributing structures in a potential historic district, but GWU also made clear its expectation that conversion of the buildings to accommodate needed modern dormitories would necessitate partial preservation and expansion of the existing buildings.

The historic preservation plan steers potential future development away from the historic streetscapes on F and G and the side streets in between, and into the less sensitive core campus along 22nd north of G Street. The proposed increase in maximum building heights in this development area allows the university to concentrate much of its future construction at a location that is removed from both the historic neighborhood as well as the monumental L'Enfant Boulevard of 23rd Street. In effect this is an internal shift of campus density that allows for preservation of the scale and character of the historic environment at the heart of the campus. The preservation plan was adopted by the Zoning Commission as part of GWU's campus plan in 2007.

In 2012, HPO began working with GWU on establishing a GW/West End Historic District with associated Design Guidelines, both of which are currently still being refined. However, since the development of the 2007 preservation plan, GWU has worked proactively and cooperatively with HPO for projects located within the pending Historic District to ensure appropriate preservation treatments. Given the University's accelerated timeline to get development underway on Square 77 in order to meet mandated deadlines for

accommodating students on campus, HPO agreed to work with GWU to review the project before the GW/West End Historic District is officially adopted. This would allow GWU to process its demolition permits without a public hearing by the Mayor's Agent, but the public interest arguments which could be anticipated at such a hearing would likely be a reiteration of those presented during the extended campus review process.

Proposal

The project calls for the alteration and lot combination of three brick apartment buildings -- Schenley Hall, Crawford Hall, and West End, all built in the mid 1920s -- and construction of a new residence hall to connect them into a single structure. A service alley runs along the west side of the site, and a service area with loading docks serving the Marvin Center occupies the east side of the proposed building, both of which will remain in use.

The dormitory proposal does not retain the full buildings for several reasons, including substandard conditions, structural deterioration, program needs, and efficiency. The decision was substantially informed by the existing structural condition of the buildings which included an unusual thin concrete slab construction with exterior mesh reinforcement. Over time, the mesh has separated from the slab compromising its structural integrity and likely requiring reconstruction.

The design includes preserving the first bay of each historic building, and maintaining their exterior elevations and portions of side walls. A new 12-story masonry building plus penthouse and two basement levels would be constructed in the new space created, adjoining the three historic buildings and knitting their program together for one large residential hall. Through a pair of two forms -- one long masonry bar building spanning the site, and the second a more transparent vertical projection facing H Street -- the new structure would engage the three historic buildings, and continue up an additional 4 stories to a total height of 110'.

On H Street, the new construction would extend to the ground through the interstitial space between Schenley and Crawford and serve as the location of the new building's primary entrance, announced with a projecting canopy. The main existing doors for both historic buildings will still be in use for entrances to individual units, and the main entry at Eye Street will remain through the existing central doors of the West End Apartments. Additional punched windows are proposed at the side elevations of the historic buildings in order to meet natural light requirements for individual dorm rooms.

The new building would be clad in a buff masonry, with a lighter color material for the accent and projection elements. Green roofs and occupiable roof decks are proposed at the 10 floor (roofs of the historic buildings) and an additional green roof is proposed at the roof of the bar building.

Evaluation

Even though HPO and GWU contemplated the likelihood of a proposal for partial demolition, it was agreed that for the buildings to retain some sense of their original mass and volume, the main front blocks of each should be retained and the structure repaired or reconstructed as necessary at the existing floor levels.

While this project involves demolition and a large addition, the proposed project achieves design compatibility with the context of the projected historic district through its 1) relationship to the urban context, 2) massing proportions, 3) material articulation, and 4) window composition.

- 1) The project is compatible as it relates to its immediate urban context, which is surrounded by large-scale buildings. Although the 110' height would be visible from locations around the campus and from the academic quad across H Street, the new construction would be set back from the historic elevations sufficiently to respect their existing heights. As is typical of additional setback height on buildings that are already quite tall, the additional height would not be readily visible from immediate street views closest to the buildings.
- 2) The massing of the historic buildings and the new construction work well together in forming a composition that is respectful of the existing historic buildings. Each historic building retains sufficient depth (between 39' to 57') to retain a sense of their individuality while the slight overlap

of the bar of the new construction creates a connection that allows the historic buildings to be celebrated and stand on their own.

- 3) The material articulation of the building also helps create compatibility. The light masonry color in combination with the lighter colored accent and projection elements help break down the mass of the addition in size and weight and are a welcome contrast to the dark red and tan historic buildings. At the east side a series of light colored projections relate to the proportions of the historic bays. The vertical projection facing H Street introduces a new material and window articulation that helps weave the massing forms together between old and new, while identifying the primary entrance to the residence hall.
- 4) The window composition successfully achieves a punched rhythm that works well with the existing structures. The proposal also calls for the addition of new punched openings in the east and west elevations of the historic buildings which will be the same character and proportion to the existing windows.

Though there are many aspects of the project that are compatible with the pending historic district, the penthouse structure could benefit from further study. The penthouse structure is stepped back from each side of the new building, but currently measures 227' long x 25' deep x 15'-6" tall. Although the penthouse height is not calculated as part of the building height, the overall size is overwhelming. As a result, the penthouse is very visible from the street and could be dramatically improved by setting the penthouse footprint back further from the north and south and lowering the height if possible. The penthouse cladding will also be an important consideration.

Ayers Saint Gross worked closely with HPO to address all of the historic preservation concerns through an exhaustive series of studies examining setbacks, height, massing projections, window articulation, entry sequence, interior structure and circulation connections, and relationship to the existing structures. These working sessions helped shape the design direction that achieves compatibility, setting them on a successful path for developing the project.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board:

- *Approve the mass, footprint, and design direction of the proposed alteration and new construction;*
- *Direct the applicants to continue studying the architectural character of the addition, with consideration given to materials, color, and entry canopy design and window frame selection;*
- *Direct the applicants to continue working with staff to further develop the building materials and details;*
- *Direct the applicants to continue to study the green roofs and roof deck design and confirm that the roof deck railing will not be visible from the street;*
- *Direct the applicants to minimize the penthouse both in height and length;*
- *Have the project return to the Board for further review when appropriate.*